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STATE FOR G, OES/FO, OES/PCI, OES/EGC, AND SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: A/S MCMURRAY URGES INDIA TO MOVE FORWARD ON SOUTH ASIAN
WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT NETWORK

[11](#). (U) OES Assistant Secretary Claudia McMurray met with Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) Secretary Meena Gupta on the sidelines of the Global Issues Forum on April 24, 2008 in order to engage the MoEF on the formation of a South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN). Mr. M.B. Lal, Additional Director General, Wildlife, and Dr. R.B. Lal, Inspector General of Forest, Wildlife, also attended the meeting. A/S McMurray was accompanied by the Regional Environmental Officer and FSN from Embassy Kathmandu as well as EmbOffs from Embassy New Delhi.

[12](#). (U) A/S McMurray opened the discussion by noting the proposed SAWEN was discussed earlier in the day at the Global Issues Forum (GIF) where Foreign Secretary Menon had agreed a regional wildlife enforcement network was needed and likened the concept to a similar and successful regional South Asian network combating narcotics trafficking (septel). A/S McMurray explained the U.S. interest in a SAWEN and drew a parallel to U.S. support for the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) which has been operating successfully due to regional cooperation which has proved instrumental in cracking several wildlife crime rings. She offered similar support, initially in the form of training, to SAWEN and expressed hope that the countries of South Asia could formalize SAWEN at the upcoming meeting of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Program (SACEP) Ministerial Meeting to be held in Jaipur in late May 2008.

[13](#). (U) Secretary Gupta was aware that SAWEN had been discussed at the GIF meeting which Dr. R.B. Lal had attended. She informed A/S McMurray that there was no firm MoEF position on the issue and that there were differing views within the Ministry. Dr. Lal stated he did not see merit in "another additional" wildlife network commenting that India already had bilateral agreements with Nepal and China and already participated in the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking as well as the Global Tiger Forum (GTF). While not endorsing SAWEN, Secretary Gupta intervened saying that the GTF is only for tigers and is quite "dormant." She stated India would review the issue and would present its position at the SACEP Ministerial.

COMMENT

[14](#). (SBU) The fact that MoEF is unwilling to come out in support of

SAWEN at this time indicates a shift in power within the ministry. Secretary Gupta has welcomed and been very appreciative of

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international cooperation on wildlife issues in the past and has spoke positively to EmbOff regarding the SAWEN. However, her tenure as Secretary of MoEF is slated to come to an end in June 2008 and it appears other elements within MoEF, especially Dr. Lal, who prefers to avoid international commitments and any potential exposure of India's lack of capacity in combating wildlife crime, is exerting greater influence. However, Dr. Lal's newly appointed superior, Additional Director M.B. Lal, who remained silent during the meeting, may be a useful counterweight in promoting the SAWEN. EmbOffs will pursue this avenue via a courtesy call on new Additional Director Lal.

15. This cable has been cleared by A/S McMurray.

MULFORD